

## Historical Perspectives: Santa Clara University Undergraduate Journal of History, Series II

---

Volume 21

Article 13

---

2016

# The Right's Revolution: How the Rise of the Religious Right and the Nomination of Barry Goldwater Harnessed the Changing American Political Landscape

Ryan Polito

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarcommons.scu.edu/historical-perspectives>

 Part of the [History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Polito, Ryan (2016) "The Right's Revolution: How the Rise of the Religious Right and the Nomination of Barry Goldwater Harnessed the Changing American Political Landscape," *Historical Perspectives: Santa Clara University Undergraduate Journal of History, Series II*: Vol. 21 , Article 13.

Available at: <http://scholarcommons.scu.edu/historical-perspectives/vol21/iss1/13>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Historical Perspectives: Santa Clara University Undergraduate Journal of History, Series II by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact [rscroggin@scu.edu](mailto:rscroggin@scu.edu).

**The Right's Revolution:  
How the Rise of the Religious Right and the Nomination of Barry  
Goldwater Harnessed the Changing American Political  
Landscape  
Ryan Polito**

A year ago no one would have believed that it would be Donald Trump, a billionaire whose campaign for president in 2012 was considered laughable, would be the GOP candidate. Trump claims to represent the “silent majority” of Americans, a term coined by Richard Nixon in a speech supporting the Vietnam War, contrasting this group to the vocal anti-war protestors.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, the radical ideas Trump is proposing are striking a chord with a large majority of Americans, representing a shift in U.S. politics. This sudden emergence of a new section of the GOP, one not supported by the current establishment, is difficult to explain. The rise of conservatism and neo-conservatism, which peaked with the elections of Ronald Reagan and Bush Sr. and Jr. to the presidency, exhibits patterns that are eerily reflective of the current political situation.

In the late 1950s and early 60s, a grass roots movement emerged across the nation, but especially in Southern California. The conservative movement, fueled by Evangelical migrants from the dust bowl, would champion small government, Christian moral values, and a policy of strong anti-communism and a powerful American military. The catalyzing moment for this group came with the nomination of Barry Goldwater as the GOP candidate. A polarizing figure, not supported by traditional Republicans, Goldwater owed his victory to this new class of Californian conservatives.

But why was it that this group of Evangelicals became so involved in politics, so determined to impose their moral values on the nation? The answer lies in the heart of Southern California, where the conflict between the religious right and secular liberals began. During the Great Depression, migrants from the south felt oppressed in their new home on the west coast. The roots of conservatism were planted here, but it required the work of charismatic leaders, such as Billy Graham,

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard Nixon, “Nixon’s Silent Majority Speech.” *Watergate.info*, Accessed May 9, 2016, <http://watergate.info/1969/11/03/nixons-silent-majority-speech.html>

William F. Buckley Jr., and Robert Welch to spur this disenfranchised population to take an aggressive stance against communism and embrace an active role in the public sphere, forever changing the landscape of American politics. Goldwater's polarizing politics reflected a historical trend in which a vocal minority of Americans supported an extremist candidate.

Conservatives were tired of the liberal establishment and felt their government had failed to support them. This historical trend is being seen today as a modern vocal minority stands in favor of a new extremist candidate.

Understanding the factors that contributed to right wing, populist extremism in the 1960s provides a better understanding of conservative extremism today.

### **Southerners Come to California**

The rapid expansion of the American west in the nineteenth century led to a massive land grab, where Americans seeking new opportunities sought to stake a claim and farm the open spaces of the American frontier. However, by World War I, rapid population increase and shortsighted farming techniques had rendered many parts of Texas, Arkansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma uninhabitable. Disaster would strike in the 1930s with the worst droughts experienced in over 40 years combined with America's entry into the Great Depression. According to historian James Gregory, "In excess of 1,300,000 people left the Southwest between 1910 and 1930, roughly 24 percent of them resettling in California," a total influx of approximately 312,000 migrants to California.<sup>2</sup> Seeking new opportunities, families piled into cars by the thousands and made their way west. With them they brought new ways of living, new ways of talking, and most importantly, deeply engrained belief systems. The "Okies" as they were called, not so cleverly named after their state of origin Oklahoma, "brought many denominations westward including various Baptists, Pentecostals, Assemblies of God, and other groups of that which John Reed has called 'low church Evangelical religions'..."<sup>3</sup> These new religions opposed the traditional views of the Californians already living in the area. As historian Thomas D. Norris puts it, the new immigrants were, "fervently religious in a fundamentalist, independent, and wholly southern-oriented fashion

---

<sup>2</sup> James N. Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 7.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas D. Norris, "Southern Baptists and the 'Okie' Migration: A Sectarian Rebirth in California, 1930s-1940s," *Locus* 2, no. 1 (July 1989), 36.

that was alien to the more staid and hierarchical churches predominant in the Pacific states prior to the 1930's. Their religion supplied them with a feeling of home in what was in many respects a foreign land.”<sup>4</sup> This need to find a home was exemplified by an intense pushback against this group by the natives of California. Like many immigrants before them, the plethora of southern immigrants were ostracized and discriminated against. In the peak of the depression, these migrants were viewed as a burden on society. This backlash prompted Okie communities to further embrace their own culture, which further differentiated them from Californian society.

Okies were branded lazy, a burden, and as a group that demanded extra government aid that was not warranted. California farmers struck out against the new influx of families attempting to find a new place in their society. An article from the *Los Angeles Times* on March 18th 1940, defended this aggression, “The farmers were very much in the same position as any of you city people would be if you should wake up some morning and find ten or a dozen families camped on your lawn or on the sidewalk in front of your home, all asking for jobs you didn’t have or relief you couldn’t afford to give.”<sup>5</sup> In the context of a 30% unemployment rate, these responses were understandable, but the consequences of being ostracized would be severe and create tensions between older Californians and this new group.

These tensions would manifest themselves not just economically, but would also center on cultural and religious differences between these two groups. The majority of migrants were Southern Baptist, which even today remains the largest Protestant denomination in the United States.<sup>6</sup> Southern Baptism was a religion steeped in moral certainties and close-knit community values. These folk were shocked by the seeming moral laxity and lack of traditionalism seen in the Northern Baptist churches and other established groups already present in California. Gregory writes of southern migrants, “religious culture infused nearly every aspect of life in the Southwest... the area participated vigorously in the moral reform crusades of the early twentieth century, passing in many jurisdictions

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> “Nation Challenged on ‘Okies’ Problem: Four Students of California Situation Fear Thousands More Will Join ‘Joads,’” *Los Angeles Times*, March 8, 1940.

<sup>6</sup> Norris, “Southern Baptists and the ‘Okie’ Migration,” 37.

not just prohibition legislation but also tough laws limiting divorce.”<sup>7</sup> Migrants brought their certainty in these ideals with them and were disappointed in the lack of religious fervor felt by their Californian counterparts. It is in attempting to impose these ideals that the first tracks of religious political intervention are seen and the religious right was born.

Both groups contributed to the tensions. The migrants were looking for a new home, and had it not been for the hostile reactions of Californians, they likely would not have closed ranks so completely. Farmers in California were the most actively hostile towards Okies, but so too were politicians and religious leaders. Baptists arriving were welcomed with less than open arms by the Northern Baptists already in place. Norris writes, “Northern Baptist ministers had reviled George Mouser and his followers (Southern Baptists) as ‘no-good Okies and Arkies,’ shiftless drifters and migrants.”<sup>8</sup> Unable to join local churches, southerners established their own worshipping communities, termed “fellowships,” not yet established churches or affiliated with the national church.<sup>9</sup> Once again forced out of Californian society and determined to band together, these new people began their new lives isolated from society, from work, and even from their chosen religious denomination.

Within the farming camps, migrants formed tightly knit communities in which they were able to maintain their culture and provide each other with a support system in a hostile environment. Once relocated however, this sense of community was to be found in their local churches. Dochuk gives the example of one Melvin Sahan who “saw his parents falling into debt, even with his own weekly ten dollar paycheck from Goodyear helping out. In response, the Shahan’s church organized a ‘pounding,’ a ritual that saw congregants stock the pantry of a needy and unsuspecting friend with canned goods, preserves, and smoked meat.”<sup>10</sup> In their time of hardship, it was neither the New Deal nor the government that stepped in on their behalf. It was their own community, and a strong and undying faith, which had saved them. In this context, the seeds of belief in community values and imposing moral authority were planted. After

---

<sup>7</sup> Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California*, 192.

<sup>8</sup> Norris, “Southern Baptists and the ‘Okie’ Migration.” 43.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>10</sup> Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism*. Kindle edition. (New York: Norton, 2012), location 749.

all, had the native secularists of California not spurned them when they had asked for help as fellow Christians and fellow Americans?

The teachings of Jesus Christ had clearly been forgotten among their new neighbors. True to their faith, the marginalized Okies sought to spread their belief systems and to learn to help themselves rather than accept their newfound inferior position in life or resort to violent measures. Collective witness “door-to-door campaigns in hopes of drawing interested-but ‘spiritually lost’ neighbors” became the means of shifting the mindset of those who had pushed so hard against their relocation.<sup>11</sup> These Protestants “were among the most active in building cross--denominational alliances to counter what they perceived as illicit activities in their communities.”<sup>12</sup>

These new migrants, while still voting republican, came out against the progressive reformers of the early twentieth century. Progressives championed large governmental intervention and the migrants opposed it, instead focusing on the value of the community organizations in place that helped them in their new home. The massive influx of migrants had a profound impact on changing the voting demographics even before the 1930s. Historian Casey Sullivan outlines the importance of this new group in the gubernatorial election of 1926, “Richardson’s (Friend Richardson, governor from 1923-1927 was running for re-election as a Progressive Republican) best performance came from southern California, where regulars now consistently outperformed progressives in statewide and national elections.”<sup>13</sup> Clearly, this new group had significant voting power in California and served as an important population to be won over by both parties.

Drought, poverty, famine, and forced migration had all taken a heavy toll on the migrants from Texas, Arkansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma. Many Californians responded as Californians had done in the past to Chinese immigrants, or as some do towards Mexican immigrants today, and blamed the State’s problems on the new migrants. Forced to form new communities, these migrants turned to God and to each other. As we will see, these hostilities

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Darren Dochuk, “Religion in the Early Twentieth Century,” In *A Companion to California History*, eds. William Deverell and David Igler (San Francisco: Wiley 2013), 267.

<sup>13</sup> J Casey Sullivan, “Way before the Storm: California, the Republican Party, and a New Conservatism, 1900–1930,” *Journal of Policy History* 26, no. 4 (October 2014), 568–94.

continued and these frustrated and passionate southern Christians would turn towards politics and powerful religious leaders who encouraged their participation.

### **The Cold War: A Response to Liberalism**

Bible-Belters in the south utilized political activism to encourage a morally upstanding society. In California, the religiously devout would attempt similar tactics, but with the start of the Cold War, these Christians turned to anti-communist leaders and crept ever closer to conservative extremism. In the spirit of compassion and the Christian values of charity and community, Baptists and Evangelicals had traditionally leaned towards the political left. Strong support of the Townsend plan from these groups in southern California, serves as a prime example of then liberal beliefs. This plan, put forth by physician Francis Townsend, would grant money to all unemployed Californians over the age of 60. This monumental piece of legislation, proposed during the height of the great depression, is considered to be one of the key precursors to Roosevelt's New Deal.<sup>14</sup>

Those against the plan argued that it would be too costly and inhibit business. Henry Pritchett, President Emeritus of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, argued in the *Los Angeles Times* in 1936 that the plan, "proposes to have the government of the United States go into the pension business for the entire population. This would be to destroy the integrity of our political system."<sup>15</sup> Conservative opponents of this plan claimed it was communist sympathizing and would damage the already fragile economy by allocating resources away from business. Evangelicals, though never supportive of big government, were in favor of the charitable nature of the plan. In addition, as a group primarily consisting of individuals of low socio-economic standing, this plan directly benefited them. In addition, they were still willing to support legislation allied with their religious views, including the value of charity. The large group of Evangelicals in southern California waged a campaign in favor of

---

<sup>14</sup> Darren Dochuk, "Christ and the CIO: Blue-Collar Evangelicalism's Crisis of Conscience and Political Turn in Early Cold-War California," *International Labor and Working Class History*, no. 74 (October 2008), 76–100.

<sup>15</sup> Henry S Pritchett, "The Townsend Plan: President Emeritus, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching," *Los Angeles Times*, February 23, 1936.

the bill, and although the bill was not passed it nevertheless demonstrated the potential power of this group in Californian politics.

By 1940, western southern natives, the migrants of the dust bowl, made up 10.8% of the population of California.<sup>16</sup> America's entry into World War II finally put an end to the Depression, and southern Christians had established themselves as a close knit and permanent group in the southern part of California. Already busy changing the society around them with evangelizing missions, their potential as a unified political entity was undeniable. Democrats, now the liberal party in the United States, seemed the natural party toward which this blue-collar group would gravitate. However, in the Cold War context and with increasing liberalization of the morals of American society, southern Californian Christians were forced to decide between their religious convictions and their political ones. Ultimately, they would consolidate both within the GOP and propel religious conservatism to the forefront of American politics.

Darren Dochuk identifies the catalyzing event that initiated the shift of Evangelicals from the left to the right as the Ham and Eggs movement. This was an important event, but it was not the only defining moment, it was merely one step in the process that would really gain traction in the late '60s and early '70s. The Ham and Eggs movement was a plan originally put forward in 1937 and mirrored the Townsend Plan. According to Dochuk writes, "led by the brother tandem of Willis and Lawrence Allen and engineered by one-time End Poverty in California (EPIC) official Sherman Brainbridge, Ham and Eggs was formed in 1937 with hopes of curing economic depression by making the government fund pensioners with a weekly allowance."<sup>17</sup> This allowance was to be 31 dollars paid weekly to unemployed citizens over the age of 50. The term Ham and Eggs was coined by Bainbridge who eloquently proclaimed, "We must have our ham and eggs!"<sup>18</sup>

World War II put the bill on hold as politicians were focused on defeating the spread of fascism; welfare related issues were put on hold. After the war, the Allen brothers once again tried to reintroduce their plan. After their initial failure, they were very aware that a change in political strategy was necessary. Appealing

---

<sup>16</sup> Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Dochuk, "Christ and the CIO," 79.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



to the Evangelicals who had so staunchly supported the Townsend act seemed to be a logical conclusion. Still, the Allen brothers were themselves not the most devout men and therefore sought alliances with religious leaders in Southern California. They reached out to pastor Jonathan Perkins, who “assembled the ‘California Pastors’ Committee,’ comprised mainly of local Pentecostal and Baptist ministers but also of more prominent clerics like Trinity Methodist’s Reverend Bob Shuler... this band of preachers immediately set about encouraging those in their pews to rally behind Ham and Eggs.”<sup>19</sup>

During this campaign the Soviet Union and United States emerged as competing world superpowers in the wake of Germany’s defeat. The Cold War had begun. Fear of socialism and communism swept the nation and there was large support for “extreme red-baiters such as Senator Joe McCarthy, who applied constant pressure on the White House to live up to their rigid standards of anticommunist purity.”<sup>20</sup> The leaders of the Ham and Eggs movement jumped on this political movement, maintaining that their new law was fundamentally anticommunist and would provide support for the hardworking people of California without redistributing the wealth. To hammer this point home, the Allens turned to Gerald L. K. Smith, a devout Christian and fierce anticommunist. Smith doubled the number of subscriptions to the Ham and Eggs newsletter.<sup>21</sup> The fervor of the Ham and Eggs movement died quickly as William and Lawrence Allen shifted the movement in favor of liberal agendas in a shrewd political move. They traded alignment with the left in exchange for Lawrence’s ascension to the Attorney General should the left be victorious. The disappointed conservatives, who had so willingly supported the cause, still imbued with anticommunist sentiment and with even more disdain for large government, looked for new political and spiritual leaders.

Dochuk argues that the Evangelicals reluctantly went along with this new anticommunist stance, privileging their religion over their status as blue-collar workers. The decade leading up to Goldwater’s nomination in 1964 demonstrated a continued pattern of eagerness by Evangelicals to support radical anticommunist leaders and moral imperialists. In ever increasing numbers, Evangelicals took up

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>20</sup> Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War; The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America’s Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2012), 81.

<sup>21</sup> Dochuk, “Christ and the CIO,” 83.

the crusade against communism, liberalism, and traditional conservatism. Three men, William F. Buckley Jr., Richard Welch, and Billy Graham were instrumental in organizing this transition, and stand as examples of the shift in thinking among Californian conservatives.

A variety of developments had taken place in Southern California since Evangelical migrants had first begun arriving in the early 1930s. They help to explain how this group was able to take up seemingly contradicting causes: The desire for a small government that would stay out of people's lives while imposing religious moral authority, all the while spending billions on defense.

In the era leading to the great depression, Evangelicals had been content to bow down to the moderate conservatives. Many more were willing to accept some of the New Deal policies put forth by Roosevelt and his cabinet. After all, this group was hit hardest by the free market policies of the earlier era and relied of the charity of primarily their communities, but sometimes the government to survive in the 1930's. However, World War II led to a dramatic shift. Southern Californian was the heart of American war manufacturing. It was here that the American war machine was designed, manufactured, and propagated.<sup>22</sup> The farmers who had so struggled to find work found themselves at the center of an economic boom. A remarkable two million new jobs were created in California, and Los Angeles had grown by half a million new residents, earning its place as the second largest manufacturing city in the nation.<sup>23</sup> Southern Californians found a new reason to defend big businesses and, more importantly, to defend the military budget.

Throughout this process, despite their newfound political interests, these California conservatives remained devoted to their respective faiths, Pentecostalism, Southern Baptism, and other Evangelical religions continued to flourish in the region. These religions were not just maintaining their memberships, they were growing. The Southern Mission Baptist Church tripled between 1951 and 1953.<sup>24</sup> A newly prosperous, but morally unchanged population had emerged in the Cold War and its members sought to take the advantages God had bestowed upon them to fight the spread of communism, an ideology that claimed religion to be, "the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul

---

<sup>22</sup> Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, location 1107.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Alan Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 68.

<sup>24</sup> Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, location 1176.

of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.”<sup>25</sup>

Onto the public stage entered recent Yale Graduate William F. Buckley Jr. His first publication in 1951, *God and Man at Yale: The Superstition of “Academic Freedom,”* attacked any idea system that did not support individualism and Christianity.<sup>26</sup> Buckley and his brother in law L. Brent Bozell quickly came out in support of Senator Joe McCarthy following his infamous trials against alleged communist sympathizers. For many, even conservatives, these trials were viewed as oppressive attacks and, at the very least, poorly managed. Buckley and Bozell managed to weave a story that McCarthy’s stance against communism rendered him a man around whom “men of good will and stern morality may close ranks.”<sup>27</sup> For newly wealthy Evangelicals, McCarthy represented a moral stance against the increasingly liberal world closing in on them.

This discontent with not only the left, but also the moderate conservatives, represented by Eisenhower’s government is demonstrated in the content of *The National Review*, the magazine set up by Buckley that to this day serves as a voice of conservatism. Buckley and his readers believed that everything possible should be done to stop the spread of communism, even going so far as to suggest revolution should a communist government be democratically elected.<sup>28</sup> The publication’s religious rhetoric appealed to the crusading hearts of Evangelicals. Its publisher, William Rusher, wrote, “I think we had better pull in our belts and buckle down to a long period of real impotence. Hell, the catacombs were good enough for the Christians!”<sup>29</sup>

Through such militant rhetoric, Bozell and Buckley opposed anything that remotely resembled communist ideals including welfare of any kind and a large government funded through high taxes. Bozell’s account of Barry Goldwater, written under the pseudonym Barry Morris, asserts “by reducing taxes and spending we will not only return to the individual the means with which he can

---

<sup>25</sup> Karl Marx and Joseph O’Malley. *Critique of Hegel’s “Philosophy of Right”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 62.

<sup>26</sup> Heather Cox Richardson, *To Make Men Free: A History of the Republican Party*. (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 247.

<sup>27</sup> William Buckley, *McCarthy And His Enemies*. (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 1995), 110.

<sup>28</sup> Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 74.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

assert his freedom and dignity, but also guarantee to the nation the economic strength that will always be its ultimate defense against foreign foes.”<sup>30</sup> Of course, it is hard to imagine how a military strong enough to defeat communism was to be funded in the absence of significant taxes. These leaders had embarked on a slippery slope of political contrarianism and inspired the shift to a new conservatism.

Even more vocal opponents of communism also laced their sentiments with Christian rhetoric. The radical Robert Welch founded the most notable anticommunist organization in 1958 shortly after Buckley took a public role.<sup>31</sup> The John Birch Society was named for a Christian missionary turned anticommunist who “met his death at the hands of Mao Zedong’s Red Army.”<sup>32</sup> Under Welch’s leadership these new Christian soldiers sought to eradicate communism from the U.S. government and abroad.

Robert Welch was a controversial figure in the early years of American movement conservatism. Many, even those on the extreme right, felt Welch to be a reckless and far too unstable leader. Some members of his own rank and file deemed his views to be unreasonable. An article published in *The National Review* on February 13, 1962 reported, “months before the Liberals even heard of Mr. Welch, many of his associates and enthusiasts were urging Mr. Welch to reshape his views, and they proceeded on the assumption that in due course he would.”<sup>33</sup> Of course, he did no such thing. Among the statements made by Welch cited in the article is the claim that Dwight D. Eisenhower, the hero general of World War II, was a communist, and a call for full atomic war against the Soviet Union. Conservative political analyst Steve Allen wrote in 1963, “those who think that Robert Welch is *more patriotic* than Dwight Eisenhower are truly in need of psychiatric advice.”<sup>34</sup>

Welch’s opinions on the political extreme alienated many from his cause, but aspects of his philosophy appealed to a wide range of Evangelicals. The John Birch Society focused heavily on fighting communism, protesting the Civil

---

<sup>30</sup> Barry Morris Goldwater and C. C. Goldwater, *The Conscience of a Conservative*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), 62.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Mallon, “A View from the Fringe.” *New Yorker* 91, no. 43 (January 11, 2016), 63–69.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>33</sup> “The Question of Robert Welch,” *National Review* 12, no. 6 (February 13, 1962), 84.

<sup>34</sup> Steve Allen, “How to Attack a Liberal.” *National Review* 14, no. 8 (February 26, 1963), 149.

Rights movement, and promoting government at the local rather than national level. It is this last level that probably most appealed to the mass of Evangelicals at the time. The John Birch Society utilized rhetoric and strategies familiar to those used to going door to door to spread their faith. In a speech Welch gave on the role of schools, for example, he proclaimed, “Join your local P.T.A at the beginning of the school year, get your conservative friends to do likewise, and go to work to take it over.”<sup>35</sup> The Birch Society built off established and organized local groups that, significantly, were often powered by the work of women, extending their traditional conservative roles as mothers and homemakers. Michelle Nickerson, a professor at Loyola University of Chicago who specializes in conservative studies wrote, “It was women’s moral and spiritual responsibility, as mothers, to protect their families and communities from godless Communism.”<sup>36</sup>

All of the John Birch Society’s arguments focused on its opposition to “godless Communism.” Even their stance against civil rights was rooted in a belief that liberal agendas were advancing communism. A pamphlet printed by the organization in 1965 titled *What’s Wrong with Civil Rights* details their opposition. They even go so far as to suggest that the movement was “deliberately and almost wholly created by the Communists.”<sup>37</sup> Their arguments are obscure and extreme to the point of absurdity. Their main argument is based on the idea that because Blacks in the United States have it better than Blacks in other countries, and even better than white people in certain countries, they have no claim to demand more rights and in doing so they instill disunity and insurrection at home. They even go so far as to advocate the merits of imperialism and to advocate for its return. The John Birch Society was a brash, vocal, and polarizing group. Still, the John Birch Society and organizations like it would ensure the nomination of Barry Goldwater.

Although these groups represented the beginning of the extreme right and began to fuel that fire, they still represented only a loud minority. It took more moderate leaders appealing specifically to Christian rather than anticommunist

---

<sup>35</sup> William Marshall French, *American Secondary Education* (Odyssey Press, 1967).

<sup>36</sup> Michelle Nickerson, “The Power of a Morally Indignant Woman’ Republican Women and the Making of California Conservatism,” *Journal of the West* 42, no. 3 (Summer 2003), 35–43.

<sup>37</sup> *What’s Wrong with Civil Rights?* (Belmont, Mass.: American Opinion, 1965).

extremism to turn the tide in favor of Goldwater. Billy Graham served as the moderate yet passionate religious leader to trumpet this cause. In a religious movement that would sweep the nation, Graham's annual "Crusades" prompted a massive conversion to Evangelical Christianity of conservative values.<sup>38</sup> The grassroots religion had found itself a national organization to rally behind and the effectiveness of this administration would be demonstrated in the '50s and early '60s.

Billy Graham was born in Charlotte, North Carolina in 1918. His father was a Methodist and his mother a Presbyterian.<sup>39</sup> In his autobiography, Graham credits his first spiritual connection with Evangelicalism to a visiting preacher by the name of Dr. Ham. Although Graham was only 16, he recorded that Ham's "words, and his way with words, grabbed my mind, gripped my heart."<sup>40</sup> Graham was inspired to use words as Ham had and his charisma and classic good looks fueled a religious fervor. According to one article written in 1969, when Graham was 50 and past the vigor of youth, "The tall, athletic body is still lean and hard, the blue eyes still flash the fire of righteous indignation."<sup>41</sup> His followers believed in the divinity of his message and his status as a man touched by God. A biography written by Stanley High in 1956 quotes the editor of *The Church of Scotland* magazine who in referencing Graham stated, "the spirit of God was speaking through him."<sup>42</sup>

With this kind of rhetoric and devotion it is no wonder that Graham was able to attract millions of followers to his take on Evangelicalism under the banner of his organization, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA). Graham was noted for his massive rallies and Evangelical activism.<sup>43</sup> These rallies were huge even by modern standards, newspaper clippings from the late

---

<sup>38</sup> Stanley High, *Billy Graham: The Personal Story of the Man, His Message, and His Mission* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956).

<sup>39</sup> Billy Graham, *Just as I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (San Francisco: Zondervan, 1997), 25.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>41</sup> David Shaw, "Subtler Billy Graham Still Crackles Thunder," *Los Angeles Times*, September 28, 1969, Orange County section.

<sup>42</sup> High, *Billy Graham*, 30.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

'50s and early '60s frequently reference rallies in excess of 50,000 attendees.<sup>44</sup> Graham was converting people from all walks of life, but he especially appealed to those in the West, like Southern California, and in the southern states populated by Baptists, Methodist, Pentecostals, and Evangelicals.

In addition to meetings with political leaders from around the world, Graham met with every president from Truman to Obama. There were those who promoted his entry into the political game. One follower was quoted as saying, "He is so eloquent and so handsome. Isn't it a shame that he isn't in politics?"<sup>45</sup> Once Graham began to promote his political agenda it tended to align with the new conservatives, although he did not agree with the extremism of organizations such as the John Birch Society and supported progressive movements such as Civil Rights.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, Graham and his followers would take a vocal anticommunist stance. *The Los Angeles Times* quoted him in 1962 as saying, "A dedicated Christian can defeat a Communist in a debate... and I don't fear the Russian military power."<sup>47</sup> This article outlines the two main points of Graham's anticommunism. First, it should be solved through peaceful and political negotiations rather than through aggressive military action. Secondly, communism is not the epitome of evil, but simply the root of deep world problems.

Graham was not radical or new, but served as a charismatic and clever leader who was able to unite those who wished to spread the word of God and live their lives according to a conservative Christian morality. Graham and others like him had started a religious movement and these leaders were able to channel the religious passion they generated into the political realm.

### **Barry Goldwater: The Beginning of the End**

On June 2, 1964 Barry Goldwater shocked the nation by beating New York Senator Nelson Rockefeller, the champion of traditional conservatism, Governor James A. Rhodes of Ohio, Governor Harold Scranton of Pennsylvania, and UN

---

<sup>44</sup> George L Beronius, "Evangelist Tells of World Revivals: Young Leader Says People Are Afraid of What Future Holds for Their Children," *Los Angeles Times*, May 13, 1950; "Nixon to Attend Graham Rally," *Desert Sun*, July 17, 1957, no. 304.

<sup>45</sup> High, *Billy Graham*, 19.

<sup>46</sup> Perlstein, *Before the Storm*, 125.

<sup>47</sup> Shaw, "Subtler Billy Graham Still Crackles Thunder."

Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts, along with four other less notable candidates, in the Californian Republican primary. Goldwater managed to win a hard fought nomination, taking 38.3% of the total votes in the California primary.<sup>48</sup> The Senator from Arizona came nowhere close to defeating Lyndon B. Johnson in the presidential vote that November, but the strength of the support for Goldwater marked a significant turning point in the Republican party. Its leaders were now very aware that in order to secure the presidency for their party, they would need to appeal to these new movement conservatives bolstered by millions of Evangelical Americans.

It was a fortunate combination of events and rules that allowed for a Goldwater victory and California played a central role. The explosion of California's population following World War II, in response to the rapid expansion of the defense industry, meant that by 1964 California surpassed New York as the most populous state in the Union.<sup>49</sup> In addition, the rules of the Republican California primaries outlined a winner take all contest so that whoever secured the highest percentage of votes would secure all 86 of its delegates. California ensured Goldwater's nomination and shut down any effort at nominating a different candidate.

Prior to the primary in California, Rockefeller was the clear frontrunner in California and Goldwater's lead overall was tenuous. Following the Florida primary on May 24th Goldwater had established himself as the front-runner with 304 total delegates. Second was Scranton with 70, Rhodes came in third with 58, Lodge had 44, and Rockefeller pulled in at 39.<sup>50</sup> Despite Goldwater's commanding lead, a remarkable 224 votes remained uncommitted. Any candidate able to secure the California delegation would be able to appeal to the mainstream conservatives and potentially steal the nomination away from Goldwater. However, polls had repeatedly placed Goldwater behind Nelson Rockefeller. Much like the pact formed between John Kasich and Ted Cruz to stop Trump in 2016, the remaining conservatives united behind Rockefeller in a "stop Goldwater" pact.<sup>51</sup> This ploy united the traditional conservatives and seemed to be working in their favor. On May 29th, just days prior to the primary, the Louis

<sup>48</sup> Deborah Kalb, *Guide to U.S. Elections* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2016), 148.

<sup>49</sup> Perlstein, *Before the Storm*, 362.

<sup>50</sup> Kalb, *Guide to U.S. Elections*, 149.

<sup>51</sup> Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater*, 192.



Harris Poll attributed 40% of the votes to Goldwater and 49% to Rockefeller.<sup>52</sup>

Elections are always heated, but this one was particularly so. The unified front against Goldwater's politics by traditional conservatives marks a fascinating development. There was a clear disdain for Goldwater and his supporters, so much so that according to an article published in *The National Review* in October of 1964, "three men drew a parallel between Goldwater and Hitler. Specifically, George Meany, head of the AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations: the largest federation of unions in the US), Martin Luther King, head of the nonviolent Negro Movement, and Emanuel Celler."<sup>53</sup> Today, Trump has similarly been compared to the leader of Nazi Germany by many sources. Moderate conservatives and liberals were fiercely opposed to Goldwater's campaign, which championed the small government ideas and anticommunist stance of the movement conservatives. *The Washington Post* commented in June of 1964 that, "a victory for Goldwater would be a victory for the John Birch Society."<sup>54</sup> This claim was not far from the truth as it was the committed work of Buckley's and Welch's followers that had promoted unprecedented showings at the polls, and they had supported Goldwater throughout.

Graham would serve as the exception to this group, as he supported Lyndon B. Johnson. He admitted to a close relationship with Kennedy and, by extension, his Vice President. In addition, Graham favored the Civil Rights Movement that Goldwater openly opposed. However, those who followed Graham had no problem applying his political and religious beliefs in support of Goldwater, including his own daughter Anne.<sup>55</sup> To these Evangelicals, it made sense to follow the new conservatives represented by Goldwater over the moderates who had done little to combat the Soviet Union and represented the interests of big business and government rather than their local communities.

These groups worked hard to ensure high voter turnout, which would be seen clearly in Southern California. Northern California was firmly in the grasp of Rockefeller as business owners supported the mogul. Goldwater countered

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>53</sup> William F. Buckley Jr., "The Vile Campaign," *National Review* 16, no. 40 (October 6, 1964), 853–58.

<sup>54</sup> Evans, M. Stanton. "At Home," *National Review Bulletin* 16, no. 25 (June 23, 1964), 6.

<sup>55</sup> Graham, *Just as I Am*, 407.

Rockefeller “with a grassroots army of activists recruited through Young Republicans, Young Americans, and the John Birch Society.”<sup>56</sup> These groups were not just willing to campaign door to door, but also organized their communities on voting day by “tending children, making telephone calls, and carpooling every Goldwaterite to the polls,” strategies similar to the community safety nets that Dust Bowl Migrants utilized 30 years earlier.<sup>57</sup> Goldwater supporters were still evangelizing, but instead of evangelizing the word of God, they evangelized New Conservatism.

Goldwater’s supporters were just as devoted to their candidate as they were to their faith. On Election Day, “10,000 workers would make at least two checks of each voter to ensure that he or she went to the polls. Rockefeller had 2,000 precinct walkers.”<sup>58</sup> The Republicans in power may have been in favor of the establishment, but the minority supporting Goldwater was passionate, committed, and willing to take to the polls. To counter this and gain the support of old and new swaths of conservatives, Rockefeller and his allies would, as *The National Review* put it, “continually raise the ‘extremist’ issue, charging that the California GOP is falling into the clutches of the Birchers, and that the Goldwater ranks are riddled with radical rightists.”<sup>59</sup> Indeed, his ranks were riddled with radical rightists, the same radical rightists who had won him the nomination. In defense of his campaign Goldwater famously proclaimed in his nomination acceptance speech, “Extremism in defense of liberty is no vice, moderation in pursuit of justice is no virtue.”<sup>60</sup> It was clear that Goldwater had no intention of modifying the stances that had made him the Republican nominee.

The rest of the nation did not share the same opinion as Goldwater and his followers. In November, Johnson beat Goldwater in a landslide victory, grabbing 486 electoral votes compared to Goldwater’s 58.<sup>61</sup> Despite the continued efforts of his dedicated supporters, moderate conservatives and democrats could not tolerate Goldwater’s radical beliefs. Johnson adeptly played the cards laid out

---

<sup>56</sup> Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater*, 190.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Perlstein, *Before the Storm*, 353.

<sup>59</sup> John Caravan, “The Northern California Story,” *National Review* 16, no. 22 (June 2, 1964), 448–448.

<sup>60</sup> “Goldwater and Extremism,” *National Review Bulletin* 16, no. 31 (August 4, 1964), 1.

<sup>61</sup> Kalb, *Guide to U.S. Elections*, 158.

before him, claiming himself to also be a conservative in favor of aggressive foreign policy, but not as extreme as the war trumpeting Goldwater.<sup>62</sup> Of course there were other factors at work, such as the failure of the Goldwater campaign to mobilize the grassroots forces that had helped them win previously.<sup>63</sup> The nation was not yet ready for this New Conservatism. Scotty Reston wrote in *The New York Times*, “Barry Goldwater not only lost the presidential election yesterday but the conservative cause as well... He has wrecked his party for a long time to come and is not even likely to control the wreckage.”<sup>64</sup> Such a prediction, however, was not to be realized. The next half of the century would see domination by the Republican Party featuring neoconservative leaders who echoed the ideas of Goldwater and his followers.

### **Conclusion: Politics Today**

While Goldwater lost the election, he and those who followed him capitalized on the fact that many conservatives were not happy with the current establishment. With the rise of the New Left and a more extreme liberalism from Universities in the late 1960s, conservatives realized that they would need to unite in order to win elections. The John Birch Society was for the most part condemned, as it was deemed too radical even by its own members. Other organizations remained, and *The National Review* would continue to be an important voice about party politics. Patrick Buchanan’s *The Greatest Comeback*, which is about Nixon’s election to the presidency, asserts that, “If *The National Review* (NR) started attacking Nixon for trashing Buckley and those who admired him, ‘the Buckleyites,’ Nixon could not unite the Right behind him.”<sup>65</sup>

The Evangelical form of Christianity had made its way into the mainstream of conservative politics. Richard Nixon supported some of these ideas and the vocal minority shifted to the silent majority as conservatism shifted. The ultimate triumph would be the election of Ronald Reagan. His moral crusade against drugs, support for the Economic Recovery Act of 1981 (the largest tax cut in U.S history), aggressive Cold War policies, and open religious devotion were just

---

<sup>62</sup> Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater*, 252.

<sup>63</sup> Perlstein, *Before the Storm*, 506.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 513.

<sup>65</sup> Patrick J Buchanan, *The Greatest Comeback: How Richard Nixon Rose from Defeat to Create the New Majority* (New York: Crown, 2014), 37.

what the New Conservatives desired.<sup>66</sup> Movement conservatism, and by extension neo-conservatism, rose from the ground up as a small vocal group took a stand when they felt misrepresented.

There are many indicators that a similar kind of movement is establishing itself in American politics and especially within the Republican Party. Despite the opposition of neo-conservatives, now the traditionalists of our time, it is the much more extreme voice of Donald Trump that has triumphed in the primaries. Like the Evangelicals of California's past, the white working class has come to the polls in unprecedented numbers to pull off an extremist upset victory. The similarities to Goldwater are numerous. Both are labeled extremists and even compared to Hitler, both candidates promote radical and discriminatory policies such as enforcing segregation or deporting Muslims, and they took the nomination on the wings of voters rather than republican representatives. The beginning of a new form of conservatism is taking shape, and regardless of whether Trump wins the presidency or not, history indicates that the results will undoubtedly shape future American politics.

---

<sup>66</sup> Robert Trezevant, "Debt Financing and Tax Status: Tests of the Substitution Effect and the Tax Exhaustion Hypothesis Using Firms' Responses to the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981," *The Journal of Finance* 47, no. 4 (September 1, 1992), 1557–68.